DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 111 CG 026 944

AUTHOR	Canaff, Audrey L.; Hutto, Melanie D.
TITLE	Teacher as Counselor: Crisis Intervention Skills for the ABE Instructor.
INSTITUTION	Mississippi State Univ., Mississippi State.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	57p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Basic Education; Adult Counseling; Adult Education; Adult Students; *Classroom Communication; *Communication Skills; Counseling; Counseling Techniques; Counselor Teacher Cooperation; *Crisis Intervention; *Resource Materials; *Teacher Competencies; Teachers; Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

The Adult Basic Education (ABE) classroom is often viewed as a "safe haven" for participants. The teacher's actions, interest or lack of interest in participants and the degree of concern or caring expressed for the learners all make a difference in program retention. As a result of this bond between teacher and learners, ABE instructors find themselves being asked about a wide range of problems and crises that learners experience. The purpose of this monograph is to provide some guidance for teachers as to what to do and still be able to teach the other class members. It will teach instructors how to recognize ineffective communication, how to listen effectively and open channels of communication, and how to make a referral. Classroom strategies that allow the instructor to keep the classroom running smoothly, yet still guide the learner in crisis to the right individual who can help them are provided. Chapters are: (1) Introduction; (2) Roadblocks to Communication; (3) Helper Characteristics and Skills; (4) What is a Crisis? (5) Crises in the Classroom: Domestic Violence, Suicide, Parenting, Offensive Language, Learner Conflict; (6) References; and (7) Appendices. Contains 20 references. (JBJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 394 111

Teacher as Counselor: Crisis Intervention Skills for the ABE Instructor

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M. HUTTO
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Audrey L. Canaff, M.A., N.C.C.
Mississippi State University

Melanie D. Hutto, Ph.D., C.R.C., L.P.C.
Director, ABE Model Project
Mississippi State University

ABE Model Project

CG026944

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TEACHER AS COUNSELOR: CRISIS

INTERVENTION SKILLS FOR THE ABE INSTRUCTOR

Audrey L. Canaff, M.A., N.C.C.
Mississippi Adult Basic Education Model Project
Mississippi State University

Melanie D. Hutto, Ph.D., L.P.C., C.R.C.
Director, Mississippi Adult Basic Education Model Project
Mississippi State University

1995

Note

This guide to developing effective strategies for the counseling needs adult who is enrolled in an Adult Basic Education program was developed by the Mississippi Adult Basic Education Model Project, Mississippi State University. Funding for this document was made available through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education and the Federal Adult Education Act (Section 353) through the Mississippi State Board for Community and Junior Colleges. The opinions expressed are those of the authors.

The authors extend a special note of thanks to Melissa Griffin, graduate assistant, and to Diane Alexander, Administrative Secretary, for their contributions to the production of this guide.

Mississippi State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, disability, or veteran status.

The Mississippi Adult Basic Education Model Project
Funded by the Adult Education section of the
State Board for Community and Junior Colleges

Mailing address:
ABE Model Project
P.O. Box 9710
Mississippi State, MS 39762
(601) 325-7227
FAX: 601-325-8784

© copyright 1995 Mississippi State University

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction 1

2. Roadblocks to Communication 4

3. Helper Characteristics and Skills 8

4. What is A Crisis ? 21

5. Crises in the Classroom 26
   - Domestic Violence
   - Suicide
   - Parenting
   - Offensive Language
   - Learner Conflict

6. References 46

7. Appendices 48

INTRODUCTION

The ABE classroom is often viewed as a "safe haven" for participants. Teachers and other class members become family and their opinions, feelings and interactions form powerful influences for participants. Our experience at the ABE Model Project has shown that the teacher's actions, her interest or lack of interest in the participants, and the degree to which she expresses concern and caring for learners all make a difference in their retention in the program.

As a result of the strong bond that exists with learners and teachers, ABE instructors find themselves being asked their opinions about a wide range of problems and crises that learners experience. Learners may disclose problems that the ABE instructor feels inadequate to address effectively. The ABE instructor may feel the need to intervene, and at the same time, feel confused as to how best to deal with the learner and the problem presented.

The purpose of this monograph is to provide some guidance in what course to take. Our hope is to provide you with some direction as to what to do and STILL BE ABLE TO TEACH THE OTHER CLASS MEMBERS. Despite your desire to help one individual, other class members need your attention as well. Proper intervention in many of the crises learners bring to the classroom is best addressed by trained counseling professionals. This monograph will teach instructors how to recognize ineffective communication, how to listen effectively and open channels of communication, and how to make a referral. We will provide classroom strategies that will allow you to keep the

classroom running smoothly, yet still guide the learner in crisis to the right individual who can help them with their problem.

We have various types of relationships with the people in our life. As an ABE instructor, you have a professional relationship with your students and outside of work have friendships. Some individuals mistakenly think that the types of advice giving and interventions we conduct with friends can be applied to our students. This is not the case. There are a number of differences between a friendship and a professional relationship.

A friendship involves reciprocity. The two individuals participating in a friendship are equal in status and power. If I hear about your problems with your children today, I can anticipate that you will listen to my difficulties at work. In your professional relationship as an ABE instructor, your status is higher than the students. You possess the training to teach and guide them towards their goals. It is not an equal relationship. While a student may come to you and disclose problems, it is unprofessional and unethical for you to share your difficulties with her. A friendship is not time limited. Friendships have no set beginning and end. The professional relationship with a student does have an ending and is time limited. Since differences do occur in the parameters of your professional relationship and friendship, the ways we help our students with problems must take a professional tone. While you are not a counselor you can learn some elementary skills and interventions used by individuals trained in the helping fields. As stated repeatedly in the section on handling crises in the classroom, refer the learner to someone trained in counseling. While some instructors may enjoy listening and helping learners with their problems, they may get in over their heads and do more harm than

good. It does feel satisfying to know you have helped an individual. Counseling is a profession and not something to "dabble at". In the state of Mississippi, counselors are licensed. In order to receive licensing, a counselor must show that they have completed a graduate program in counseling that emphasizes specific coursework, have received supervision of their work, have passed a licensing examination, and are abiding by the ethical code of standards set by their profession.

Readers are referred in the monograph to other materials they may find helpful. At the end of each section on crises in the classroom is a list of reminders for the ABE instructor. The appendices include a sample contract that can be employed for problems ranging from use of offensive language to intervening with participant conflicts.

ROADBLOCKS TO COMMUNICATION

Thomas Gordon (1970) identified what he described as roadblocks to communication. These types of responses when given by individuals shutdown communication by being a high risk response (Bolton, 1979). A high risk response results in negative consequences to the individual making the self-disclosure. High risk responses can lead to lowered self esteem, a breakdown of effective communication and denial of the true feelings for the speaker.

Many individuals send these roadblocks to communication without knowing the undesirable effect they have. The ABE instructor may be shutting down communication in the classroom without even being aware of her behavior. By educating yourself about these common roadblocks, gaining awareness of their usage in your life and learning new, more productive alternatives, you can open communication channels in the classroom.

Gordon (1970) distinguishes 12 roadblocks that are made up of three general areas: judging, sending solutions, and avoiding the concerns of others. The following items describe each roadblock and provide an example of each.

Criticizing: Responses that are given with a derogatory tone. "If you studied harder, you wouldn't be so worried about passing your GED."

Name Calling/ labeling: Responses that deny the uniqueness and individuality of a person by classifying them. " You're such a wimp for doing that for her."

Diagnosing: These types of responses include one's hidden motives, and psychological meanings. " You're acting just like your mother."

Praising Evaluatively: Praise is sometimes used to "sweet talk" another in an attempt to manipulate them. " You're always so good and sweet."

These roadblocks involve judgment. In using any of these roadblocks, the sender is making a judgment about the person's motives, behaviors or actions. A consequence of using judging roadblocks is that the person receiving them feels defensive and attacked. Rather than taking the time to explore the true feeling or cause for a person's behavior, the sender is prejudging the individual.

Ordering: These responses are directives that may involve coercion. "Go get me that now."

Threatening: Similar to ordering, threats involve punishment that will be applied if the individual does not carry through on the request. "If you do not want to work in class, you should go home."

Moralizing: Communication that involves "shoulds," "oughts" or doing the right thing. "What would your family think of you if they knew you were stealing?"

Excessive/inappropriate questioning: Asking too many questions can have the effect of an attack or ambush. Individuals who ask excessive questions don't wait for a response to the first question without following up with another question. "Where did you go?" "Who did you go with?" "What did you do?"

Advising: Telling someone what they should do. Many times people offer advice without knowing the full extent of the problem. "Well, I think you should leave him."

These roadblocks attempt to send solutions. Communication is broken down by sending a quick solution and not fully uncovering the various elements of the problem. The individual who is receiving these types of roadblocks may feel "Hey..this is the answer. Get lost."

Diverting: Deflecting the other person's concerns by focusing attention on something else. "You think you had a bad day; let me tell you about mine."

Logical Arguments: Logical arguments focus on the facts and do not address the feeling or emotion behind a problem. " You have said you are unhappy with him and that you don't think he's going to change, so you have no other option except to leave him."

Reassuring: Reassurances are used to comfort others, rather than taking the time and energy to explore options." Of course, it will get better." "You'll get over it."

These three roadblocks are examples of avoiding the other's concerns. We can avoid another's concerns by shifting attention to something or someone else, by offering facts and logic or by placating the individual.

We have all used these roadblocks at some point. Some individuals may not have been aware that these interventions can be harmful rather than helpful. Having received so many of these roadblocks yourself, you may believe that this is an appropriate way of interacting. For others, the time and energy it takes to listen carefully to someone and hear what they are saying is too draining and roadblocks are an easy way of responding. Ultimately, these roadblocks shut down communication and do not provide a setting where an individual can work through their options. Roadblocks are a quick relief, a band aid that just covers the surface and does not get to the real core of what someone is experiencing.

To ensure that you have an understanding of roadblocks look at The Story of Millie in Appendix A. Now that we have covered *ineffective* communication, let's look at effective forms of communication. Counselors and individuals who work in the helping fields are trained to communicate effectively. In our next chapter we will examine some

characteristics of helpers that make them effective communicators and some of the listening skills they use.

HELPER CHARACTERISTICS AND SKILLS

Research (Truax and Carkhuff, 1967; Rogers, 1961) into what makes certain individuals effective helpers has focused on the characteristics that these individuals possess. These attributes create a setting where others feel able to express their feelings, experience a sense of acceptance free of judgment. Besides helper characteristics that contribute to a good relationship with others, effective helpers possess the basic skills of helping. These skills include the ability to listen and communicate effectively. We will first examine the helper characteristics that set the stage for open communication and will then discuss the skills that helpers possess that allow effective and productive communication to take place.

Empathy is the basic foundation for relating and communicating effectively. Brammer (1981) described empathy as the ability to appreciate and understand the learner's perspective. Empathy is being able to feel what the other is experiencing, or "being able to put yourself in their shoes". By being able to see things from the other's point of view, the individual who needs help feels understood and tends to self-disclose more. Empathy is a crucial skill for helpers. While it is not necessary to have experienced the same situation, most individuals are able to understand the feelings learners bring into a situation because feelings are universal. Communication of empathic listening is achieved through careful listening to the learner's words and careful choice of the appropriate "feeling word" that identifies the learner's emotion. For instance, consider the wide range of words used to describe anger, joy or sadness. Rage differs

from feeling anger in terms of its intensity. The same holds for the differences in intensity and meanings in happiness versus feeling pleasure, and feeling blue versus being despondent. When we discuss the skills helpers use, we will see how the use of empathy (being able to target a learner's feeling) is crucial in effective listening.

Genuineness is another important characteristic that helpers possess. Genuineness refers to the ability to communicate a sense of sincerity, honesty, spontaneity, and openness to the other person---being what one seems to be without pretense. Shulman (1982) defined authenticity similarly, as being one's own self and not playing a role. The ABE instructor shows authenticity by being herself and not *pretending to be* what she feels an ABE instructor should be. Congruency is a true expression of one's feelings and conducting oneself within the confines of the parameters of the profession. To be congruent means not hiding behind one's profession and acting "as if". A key element of genuineness lies in being congruent. Congruency occurs when one's actions and words match each other. When one's words and actions do not correspond, the helper will be viewed as being incongruent. Incongruency leads to others experiencing the individual (i.e., teacher) as being phony and not acting as their true self. One aspect of being genuine is using self-disclosure with a learner. Self-disclosure involves revealing information about yourself that you feel will be helpful to the learner. Self-disclosure can lead to beneficial results, if it is delivered effectively. When used ineffectively, it can result in learners feeling that the teacher has shifted the focus to self and has not heard their problems or concerns.

In order to use self-disclosure effectively one must look at the (a) purpose, (b) timing, and (c) information to be self-disclosed. The purpose of the disclosure should be helping the learner understand or clarify their situation and the alternatives available to them. One should not self disclose as a way of giving advice or a desire to shift the focus onto oneself (i.e. Look at how smart I am..this is the way I handled this situation). The timing is important because the learner may still be sharing their situation with you and may not have come to the conclusion when the instructor begins to disclose. The information to be disclosed is generally more effective if it relates to a successful outcome the instructor has had with a situation rather than an experience of failure. Given that many learners place the instructor on a pedestal, it is important to keep in mind that learners may not be aided by learning of our disappointments and foibles in life. For many in the counseling profession, the careful and productive use of self-disclosure takes time to learn and master. When in doubt about the results of using self-disclosure, it is best not to use it.

Another crucial characteristic of helpers is acceptance of the other person. Accepting the other person does not mean that you agree or condone their actions or behavior, but that you accept them as an individual. Each individual is unique in their own right. While you may not approve of a learner's remaining in a violent situation at home, you can accept his or her right to make their own choices and decisions. In accepting each learner as an individual with their own distinctive personality, keep in mind that the way to resolution for their problem may not be the same as the way for another individual who experienced an analogous situation. While one person may

experience a similar difficulty (i.e., spousal abuse), the way to resolve the problem rests on their own particular history, coping style and situation.

Helpers employ a variety of skills that lay the groundwork for effective listening and communication skills. ABE instructors can learn some of these skills and utilize them in the ABE classroom and in their personal life. Counselors are trained to hone these skills through various courses, practica and internships throughout their professional training. Counselors are taught to listen effectively; they also receive consultation and supervision from their superiors to ensure that they are on the right track. While we cannot replicate the years of classes and experience that professional counselors undergo, we can touch briefly on some skills which, if learned successfully, can increase productive communication in the classroom.

The primary skill that counselors possess is the ability to listen. This may sound elementary but "true listening" is rarely accomplished. Consider your response when someone asks how you are. Invariably we reply that we are fine even if that is not the truth. In part this is because we feel the other person may not wish to listen. If we respond that we are so-so or not doing well, the inquirer may hear our response, but not truly listen. When we *hear*, we are aware of the words being used. When we *listen*, we examine the full meaning of the response from the words used, the nonverbal cues and the inconsistencies given out. For example, when someone listens effectively, they may hear the words "I am fine", but also will see the downcast eyes, the slumping shoulders and frown upon the individual's face. All of these non-verbal cues point to an inconsistency in the individual's verbal declaration and their nonverbal disclosure. At

times we are guilty of "selective listening". We pay attention only to what we want to hear and disregard information that is contrary to what the individual really is telling us. Counselors are trained to be aware of these contradictions and use confrontation and challenging skills to clarify what the individual is expressing.

The ABE instructor can begin to gain an awareness of those components of effective listening that will help communication and begin to utilize them in the classroom. An excellent resource is Bolton's (1979) book entitled People Skills. This book has some clear descriptions of listening skills and expands on the information presented in this monograph. Besides being an excellent resource for the ABE instructor, many of our learners have read it to help them in their active listening and assertiveness skills.

Among the skills that counselors apply in effective listening are attending skills, reflective skills and assertiveness skills. Attending skills are those behaviors that indicate that "you are ready and available to listen." Among important attending skills are:

◆ Body posture- adapt an open posture that is devoid of "closed" signals (i.e. crossed arms, legs, covering of mouth). Express to the learner a posture of involvement. Lean toward the learner to express interest. Try to avoid having desks or chairs as physical barriers between you and the learner.

◆ Facial expression- Watch your facial expression in the mirror. Do you register shock, amazement or disappointment easily? This may get in the way of having the learner disclose to you. In addition, remember that your verbal words should match your physical actions to achieve a sense of congruency.

◆ Voice- Is your speech too rapid? Too loud? Do you have an even pace? A sad, crying learner will respond much better to a listener whose voice is low toned and calm, and expresses empathy, rather than one that is loud, high pitched and fast in tempo.

◆ Eye contact- Eye contact is often uncomfortable for individuals who are new to learning effective listening. Look the learner in the eye and try to hold a glance comfortably. Do not avoid the eyes or look away (this indicates lack of interest), but do not stare down the learner (this can be interpreted as a sign of arrogance or hostility). Softly hold the gaze and shift occasionally as breaks in the conversation warrant. Note that the correct usage of eye contact may vary from culture to culture. Some cultures view direct eye contact as a sign of hostility; others view downcast eyes as a sign of respect. Maintain sensitivity to the nuances of the cultures with which you come in contact in your classroom.

◆ Physical distance- The physical distance or proximity between you and the learner is an important facet of attending skills. Sit comfortably close to the learner, but not too close. Inadequate distance between you and the learner may be interpreted as a sign of invasion of their personal space. The physical distance between you and the learner may also be influenced by cultural differences; as with eye contact, be aware that alternative strategies may be needed.

Listening skills go hand in hand with attending skills. Attending skills set the stage nonverbally for creating a helping environment; listening skills are the verbal tools. We will discuss the use of reflective feelings, minimal encouragers, and questions. There

are other tools in effective listening but we will touch briefly on these three to provide some tools for the ABE instructor. Further discussion on effective listening tools can be found in the aforementioned Bolton (1979) text and in Benjamin (1978).

Having previously discussed the important role of empathy as a helper characteristic, we need to return to the practice of using empathic responses. As a means of conveying her desire to listen, the instructor can use empathic skills to pick out the feeling the learner is experiencing and reflect it back. Careful listening is needed to determine the necessary intensity of the feeling response to be reflected. Too strong or too weak a reflection may not indicate the true depth of the emotion being felt. An example of this follows:

> Learner: " I'm not so sure I can pass the GED. The test is next week, I have family coming in, my husband has started to work second shift ---- and I'm not used to all these changes!"
>
> Instructor:" You feel anxious with all these changes and are uncertain about your ability to pass the test."

In this case scenario, the learner has expressed four feelings: confusion, anxiety, fear and concern. The instructor can reflect any of these back to her with the result that the learner can (a) feel that she is being understood, (b) gain clarification about her situation, and (c) begin to address options and alternatives. In using reflection of feelings the instructor can move the learner towards identification of feelings, clarifying and summarizing the problem, opening up further discussion of the problem, and examination of alternatives and options. Reflection of feelings serves as a communication opener rather than a communication closer. Consider the Roadblocks to Communication that we

discussed previously. Some potential responses that would have closed communication are:

> Instructor : "Of course you'll pass, you did great on the practice GED." (Reassuring- avoiding the other's concern)
>
> Instructor: "You shouldn't let all these other people's actions get in the way of your goals." (Moralizing-sending a solution)
>
> Instructor: " You think too little of yourself...you have such low self-esteem." (Diagnosing-Judging).

As you can see, in comparison with the use of reflection of feelings, none of the above responses opens communications or allows the learner to understand fully their situation, or helps them arrive at possible solutions to it.

◆ Minimal encouragers are words or phrases that we use to tell the learner that we are interested, available to listen and wish to hear more. They consist of short phrases such as "mm-hmmm", "go on," "I see," or "gee." The purpose behind the use of minimal encouragers is to have the listener share more of their story with us. Non-verbal encouragers, such as head nodding and hand gestures that signify "tell me more," are also acceptable.

Questions posed by the instructor can either aid in moving the learner along in discussing and exploring their problem or confuse them and divert their attention. Use of yes/no questions will result in monosyllabic yes/no responses that close down exploration. Use of multiple questions can confuse the learner and stray off the real issue. In order to use questions effectively to get to the heart of the matter and explore an issue further, open ended questions are advised. An open ended question is not a

yes/no question. It does not provide an agenda or direction in which to take the discussion, but allows the learner the space to explore how they feel without being restrained by a set course determined by the instructor. Let's return to our scenario about the learner about to take her GED and see the differences in the types of questions and their effects.

> Learner: " I'm not so sure I can pass my GED. My test is next week and I have family coming in and my husband has started to work second shift and I'm not used to all these changes."
>
> Instructor: "Did you know you had family coming in?" (yes/no question)
>
> Instructor: " When did you find out about your family coming? Do they know you have this test coming and it's important for you to study for it? Can your husband help out?" (multiple questions)
>
> Instructor: " How do you feel about all these changes?" (open ended question)

As you can see the yes/no question turns the learner toward the issue of whether she was aware of her impending family visit. The multiple questions overwhelm the learner with the need to address too many issues at once without moving towards resolution. The open ended question explores the learner's feelings and maneuvers her toward exploration and clarification.

The last skill to be covered is <u>assertiveness</u>. Many people confuse assertion with aggression. It is important to distinguish the differences among passive behavior, assertive behavior and aggressive behavior. For the ABE instructor to have productive interactions with the participants, the instructor must act in an assertive manner. In addition to functioning assertively with the students and maintaining their rights, the instructor will be modeling appropriate behavior for them.

Assertiveness describes behavior that maintains respect for the individual and their rights and also allows for the maintenance of self respect. It does not include hostile overtones', name calling, put downs or threats. Although you may not approve of an individual's actions, you still maintain a sense of respect for them as an individual. You do not impose your beliefs or judgments on others. It is a manner of communicating your beliefs without violating the rights of others.

Submissive individuals do not express their true feelings, and often hold the rights of others of higher importance than their rights. They feel their opinion is unimportant and give greater credence to the wishes and demands of others. These individuals swallow their feelings and as a result feel misused, bitter and resentful.

Aggressive individuals do express their opinion, but they express it to the degree that it seems their opinion is the only one available. They railroad others to see it their way and discount the other person's stance and right to respect.

The following example illustrates the differences in assertive, submissive and aggressive responses:

◆ **Problem**

A student in your classroom has requested to take work home to study. After hearing her request, you allow her to take home some of your GED practice books. Since taking the GED and passing it, she has not returned the books. You have asked for the return of the books repeatedly, but she still does not bring them to class.

◆ **Aggressive response**

"I keep asking you to return these books and you never do. Here I made special

arrangements for you and you don't even have the consideration to give back our books."

◆ **Submissive response**

"When you get a chance, if it's not too much trouble, can you return those books? I know you are busy and live out of the way."

◆ **Assertive response**

"I realize that it is difficult for you to come out here since you have limited transportation, but we need those books for the other students."

A way of learning how to respond in an assertive manner is through the use of the three part assertion message (Bolton, 1979). While many individuals initially have difficulty upon attempting this, practice and time improve its ease of usage. The three part assertion message is comprised of (a) description of behavior, (b) identification of feeling, (c) tangible effect/consequence of behavior on the relationship.

When you _____ I feel _____
(description of behavior) (identification of feeling)
and _____
(tangible effect on relationship)

An example of using this three part assertion message can be seen if we translate our earlier problem into an assertive statement.

"When you do not return the books you borrowed, I feel angry and may not be as willing to make special arrangements with you in the future."

In composing a three part assertion message, one must be careful to describe the behavior in general, non-inflammatory terms. For instance, we might have been tempted to say "When you forget to return the books," instead of "do not return the books." By describing the behavior as "forgetting," we are sending a judgmental communication. The individual hearing this response may focus on forgetfulness as a character flaw, feel defensive and direct their attention to that. The end result is that we do not get what we initially wanted, namely the return of our books. The words used to describe the feeling must fit the behavior description. We may feel disappointed or angry at not receiving the books, but we would not feel hatred, enraged or murderous. The third part of the assertion message describes a tangible outcome. The person receiving this message is informed of the consequences of their actions. As with the description of the feeling and the behavior, it should be a logical and rational consequence. Consequences such as " I'll never give anything to anybody again, or I'll never trust you again, or I'll never help anyone with special accommodations" all involve threats. Once again, the result of this communication will lead to arguments about the person's motives rather than to assuring the return of the books.

By using the three part assertion message, we can get our point across and respect our own needs, while respecting the rights of others. Assertion messages are usually followed up with use of active listening skills. By using these two elements of helping skills, one can not only address their own concerns but also understand the concerns of the other individual.

Having learned about the characteristics of helpers and the skills used, we move towards identifying some of the crises that can occur in the classroom. Besides using your new'found listening skills, we will explore some interventions instructors can make when faced with a classroom crisis.

WHAT IS A CRISIS?

Before we look at specific crises that participants may bring into the classroom, it is important to define what we mean by a "crisis." The term crisis often has been used out of context; we sometimes call an occurrence in our life a "crisis" when it is not one. Often we confuse a crisis with the experience of stress, though the two are very different.

The Chinese term for crisis (*weiji*) is composed of two characters that mean danger and opportunity occurring at the same time (Wilhelm, 1967). *Krinein*, the Greek word for crisis means to decide. As a result, the term crisis is signified as a time for decision making, judgment and an opportunity for change that can reap either positive or negative results (Liddell and Scott, 1968). In a crisis, a precipitating event intrudes upon the life of an individual and results in a state of disorganization and upset. The person in crisis experiences a sense of disequilibrium and tries to obtain a sense of homeostasis by utilizing those coping behaviors that have been found to be successful in the past. If these coping behaviors are successful, the crisis is avoided. If they are not successful, the individual feels overwhelmed and is thrown into a state of crisis.

Halpern (1973) lists some of the symptoms experienced by people in crisis as:

- feelings of fatigue and exhaustion
- feelings of helplessness
- feelings of inadequacy
- feelings of confusion
- physical symptoms

- feelings of anxiety
- disorganization of functioning in work relationships
- disorganization of functioning in family relationships.

Crises have discernable and identifiable beginnings, yet what may constitute a crisis for one individual may not be considered a crisis for another. How an individual interprets the event, how resilient their coping behaviors are, and where they are developmentally all play into whether a problem situation becomes a crisis. We distinguish between two types of crisis events: (1) those that are situational and are often accidental or unexpected (e.g., a plane crash, a burglary, a flood), and (2) those that are developmental (e.g., graduating high school, getting married, retiring). Developmental crises are predictable in that they signify a movement from one level of life's developmental tasks to another. Situational crises are unexpected and can cause the individual to be caught off guard and not fully prepared for the full effects of the ir usion.

Researchers who have studied crisis intervention theory see a crisis as a time limited event. Originally a crisis had a six to eight week time span. Further research found that in many cases, crises were not resolved in this six week time frame, and often, it took months for the crisis situation to come to a resolution. The distinction is now made between the period of time it takes for a person to acquire a sense of equilibrium in their life and the period of time it takes to work through and resolve the crisis. The resolution of a crisis may take months and in certain instances, years.

A crisis differs from a stressful period or stress in that a crisis has a sudden onset and a limited duration of time. Stress is an ongoing experience that provides us with the challenge of continuing daily functioning in a manner that is less effective than before, but functioning is still possible. The person in crisis is often so overwhelmed and disorganized that daily life suffers. In stressful periods we utilize those coping behaviors that have proven to be successful, and we may find ourselves employing them in an overdrive manner. In crisis our old coping behaviors do not work; we scramble to identify ones that will work.

People who experience crisis have three behavior components that produce changes observable to outsiders: physical, mental and social. These changes noted in crisis distinguish themselves from those of the symptoms of stress. Among the physical changes evidenced in crisis are lack of appetite, insomnia and such physical or somatic complaints as headaches, nausea, and skin rashes. Mental changes include forgetting things and inability to concentrate. Within the ABE classroom, this mental shift can be seen when participants begin to have difficulties in subjects in which they had not previously experienced problems. The ability to sequence and prioritize may be lessened. Socially, the person in crisis is "just getting by" and may not have the energy or desire to speak with friends or reach out. Rather than seeking out others, the individual in crisis will isolate.

Caplan (1964) conducted the early research on crisis theory and identified seven characteristics of effective coping behavior. Among the characteristics of effective coping are:

- actively invoking help from others
- expressing positive and negative feelings
- learning to tolerate frustration
- breaking down problems to manageable pieces and working through them one at a time
- being aware of the likelihood for fatigue and disorganization, and attempting to maintain a sense of control in some area of functioning
- being willing to change
- trusting oneself and possessing a sense of optimism about the outcome.

The ABE instructor is in the perfect position to reinforce and help the individual in crisis with Caplan's (1964) suggestions of effective coping behavior. Using active listening, the instructor can help the participant identify positive and negative feelings and can be the helpful ear that is needed. The structure of the ABE program allows for the participant to continue to work on their studies towards a GED and exercise some sense of control in their life. While many students who are studying for the GED experience levels of low frustration tolerance, the instructor can help break down problems to manageable pieces and teach others that small, incremental steps with positive outcomes can lead to success. This characteristic of effective problem solving is similar to the process of setting achievable goals, something we teach our students in goal setting.

While the types of crises students bring to the classroom may be as different and unique as each individual student, we will highlight five common crises that can occur. In the next chapter we will discuss how the ABE instructor can intervene in cases of

suicide, domestic violence, ineffective parenting skills, conflicts among participants, and usage of offensive language by participants. The ABE instuctor can introduce classroom exercises (below) to help participants understand what a crisis is:

- Have learners write in their journal, or discuss, both their positive and negative coping behaviors (e.g., going on a spending spree or overeating would be considered a negative coping behavior; exercising or talking with a friend would be considered positive forms of coping styles.)

- Discuss the crises learners have experienced in the past. Did they result in a positive or negative outcome? What did they learn from the experience?

- Discuss events that learners would view as a crisis in their life. How is that different from stress they experience?

CRISES IN THE CLASSROOM

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is an epidemic problem in our country. A 1990 Senate committee report indicated that three out of four women will be victims of violent crime during their lifetime. Since 1974, assaults against women have risen 50 percent according to statistics received from a national crime survey (Leone, 1994). Estimates vary as to the extent of domestic violence though reports from mental health professionals, hospital personnel and law enforcement point to its being a widespread concern. Evidence suggests that one in six American women are beaten in their lifetime. At least two million women are subjected to physical abuse each year (Goldman, 1991).

Domestic abuse is often considered to be the most unreported crime in the United States today. For many years, we considered spousal abuse to be a private matter that remained within the couple and did not effect the community. For many years, mental health professionals believed that the woman was to blame and suffered from a form of masochism that allowed her to remain in the relationship and allow the abuse to continue.

As we became more aware of the extent and effect of domestic abuse on society, interventions aimed at helping the battered woman were developed. The battered woman's movement grew out of the creation of advocacy programs for rape victims that were established in the 1970s. Over the past decade, ten states have instituted laws requiring mandatory arrest if probable cause of abuse exists; most states require arrest if there is probable cause that a felony has been committed. Most occurrences of

domestic violence are viewed as misdemeanors, and the decision to make an arrest is often left to the arresting officer. Despite recent research that arresting the batterer and removing him from the home is the most effective intervention in reducing future battering, arrest is not often made (Goldman, 1991). Police are often hesitant to make an arrest because injuries and assaults on police have occurred during response to domestic disputes.

Research on the dynamics of the battering relationship and the reasons women remain has resulted in the discovery of two important theories. Walker (1979) described a three component cycle of abuse. The first phase is the tension building phase. In this phase, the woman can sense the buildup of tension in the home. She may attempt to placate the abuser with such behaviors as fixing his favorite meal and wearing a favorite outfit. The learner in this phase will appear preoccupied in class, overly sensitive, and appear to be "walking on eggshells."

The second phase is characterized by the battering episode. At this point, the learner may come to you and inform you that she has been abused, or may use other "red flags" to describe the presence of violence. Some learners may talk about their partner's moods, temper, anger, phases or changes. Further exploration is needed to understand fully the extent of the abuse. It is at this point that the ABE instructor needs to intervene and deal effectively with the situation and make the necessary referral.

The third phase is the honeymoon phase, in which the abuser expresses remorse and guilt, and makes conciliatory gestures towards the woman. It is not uncommon for the woman to return to the relationship and believe that things will change.

The honeymoon phase is the most difficult for the helper (in this case the ABE instructor) to understand. Having made attempts to arrange for shelter, counseling or financial assistance for the learner, the ABE instructor can be left feeling angry and hurt when the abused learner returns to the partner. Since the instructor runs the risk of overidentifying with the victim, it is crucial to remain emotionally detached and professional. Despite your desire to provide alternatives and an escape for the victim, do not cross your professional boundaries. Many counselors and individuals who are exposed to the drama of domestic violence find themselves caught in the *rescue fantasy* and go above and beyond the call of duty. The *best* way to help battered women is to educate them as to options and allow them to work through the decision making process.

Why does a woman stay in an abusive relationship? One explanation has been attributed to the concept of "learned helplessness" (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978). Characteristic of this phenomenon is the belief that the woman's life is out of her control. As the battering escalates in frequency, the woman believes this even more and is not able to find a way out. Walker (1984), in applying the learned helplessness construct in battering, identified the accompanying symptoms of apathy, difficulty in problem solving ability, depression and low self esteem in these individuals. Prior exposure to violence during childhood or in previous adult relationships reinforces this sense of learned helplessness (Walker, 1985).

The appropriate intervention for the ABE instructor in a domestic violence situation consists of the following:

- Use active listening skills to aid in identifying feelings.

- Beware of using any roadblocks in communication.

- Consult your list of referral sources and contact the local agency that counsels battered women, the local battered women's shelter/hotline, or a mental health center.

- Contact the agency yourself, explain the situation and have the worker speak with the learner. It is important that you make the call, because many of our learners are uncomfortable speaking with strangers (especially mental health professionals). Reiterate to the learner that this person is someone who is experienced in this area, and has helped many other women in the same situation. Ask the counselor's name and introduce the learner and counselor to each other. This will make the learner more comfortable with the counselor.

It is important that ABE instructors understand the concepts of the cycle of abuse and learned helplessness. Just as individuals can get caught up in the drama of domestic violence, so can the entire ABE class. It is crucial to resist having other class members get involved in the drama. The purpose of the classroom is one of learning. While the battered woman may return to her abuser, the ABE instructor should not feel that her interventions were meaningless. Education is power; the ABE instructor plays an important role in educating about abuse. Many battered women find the courage to leave violent relationships once their self esteem has increased. The acquisition of the GED may begin the path of escape.

Last, but not least, we are seeing an increase both in domestic violence and in harassment at work and other settings which the battered woman might frequent. If a learner is experiencing a domestic violence situation, be aware that you and your class may be placed in danger. Develop a policy concerning safety precautions. Identify a security guard or individual to walk her to her car. Establish a policy concerning calls and visits from individuals who inquire about participants.

Domestic violence can stir the most personal feelings in all of us concerning relationships, violence and power. It is a very sensitive area and should be handled by professionals in the field. Some things to keep in mind when dealing with a learner who discloses violence are:

- Remain detached emotionally and aware of the purpose you serve in the classroom. As an ABE instructor, you are there to keep the class on task.

- Be aware of possibly overidentifying with the victim and losing your objectivity. Keep in check any strong feelings of rage or anger at the abuser.

- Keep in mind the cycle of abuse and learned helpless, and the role they play in domestic violence.

- Be aware that the decision to leave a violent relationship is multifaceted. The relationship between your learner and her partner may be more complex than you are aware.

- Bring in materials, pamphlets and speakers on domestic violence to educate yourself and the class.

Suicide

The potential for having a suicidal participant in your classroom is quite high. There are approximately 30,000 suicides in the United States each year, costing states and municipalities an estimated four billion dollars each year (Frederick & Lague, 1978). Women attempt suicide more often than men, but men have a higher proportion of successful suicides. Men often choose more active forms of suicide attempts such as hangings and shootings. Women often ingest pills or inhale toxic substances. Adolescents are at a high risk of suicide because of their impulsivity and inability to see the consequences of their actions. Although the elderly comprise 10 percent of the population, 25 percent of all suicides occur within this age group. Although the married elderly have a lower rate of suicide than unmarried elderly, 60 percent of those who commit suicide have a physical disorder (Janosik, 1984).

Many ABE instructors may have difficulty comprehending how an individual can even consider suicide. Even though you may have never experienced a suicide within the confines of your classroom, you may have seen learners experiencing depression. Depression is often a precursor to suicide. Hopelessness is the hallmark of suicidal individuals. They feel they have lost all hope and grow despondent. The suicidal learner may not know how to communicate their sense of despair. Often the despair is communicated through physical and behavioral symptoms. The learner who is depressed may look disheveled when they previously came to class neatly attired and groomed. They may complain of sleep problems, lack of hunger, inability to concentrate and feelings of worthlessness and guilt. They may be unable to comprehend material they

were previously able to master. The depressed student may express negative feelings towards themselves, have difficulty thinking about the future and paint a pessimistic picture of themselves, their accomplishments and their future.

All suicidal threats should be taken seriously. The idea that some individuals threaten suicide as a means of attracting attention is false. Many successful suicides are committed by those individuals who have made attempts in the past. Some individuals are drawn to suicide after a friend or relative makes an attempt. Participants may state that they "don't want to live", that they will take the GED test "if they are still around", or that they wish they "would not wake up again."

By utilizing active listening skills, the teacher can identify whether the learner has the intent and the means with which to harm themselves. Intent is defined as having an active, specific plan to suicide. Means is determined by whether the participant has the necessary means (e.g., gun, pills) to follow through with the plan. Many teachers may be reticent about asking about a plan for fear that they "will put ideas in the person's head". The person who is suicidal and serious about making a suicide attempt will have a plan. Once the presence of a plan has been established, the teacher can ask about the availability of means to suicide. If the learner is able to state that they are going to take pills and has access to pills, referral to the local suicide hotline or emergency room or mental health center is warranted.

At this point, the teacher must take immediate action and call the emergency room or hotline for the learner and have them speak with the appropriate professional. While teachers can be effective in screening and conducting some active listening with the

participant, they should not try to counsel the individual themselves. It is best left to trained counseling professionals to speak with the learner and have them dismantle the suicidal plan. Attempting to change the suicidal person's mind by advice giving, preaching and presenting various reasons to live may backfire and result in the suicidal person feeling *more* guilt and worthlessness. The suicidal individual is experiencing hopelessness and confusion. Attempts at providing arguments to live (e.g.,What about your children? How will your family feel? What about God?) will only plummet them into a deeper sense of despair.

Recent attention has been paid to the growing occurrence of suicide clusters in schools and communities. While we are not certain why this phenomenon exists, it is common for one individual suicide to spur others to attempt or commit suicide in the same setting. A potential suicidal threat is dangerous not only to the individual, but also to the entire class. The ABE instructor should be aware of any changes in the student's physical, mental or social status. A quick and appropriate referral can result in providing safety for the student and the class as well.

In dealing with the severely depressed or suicidal student, ABE instructors should do the following:

- Maintain your professional demeanor and detach yourself emotionally. Be aware of your own feelings about suicide and death.

- Use the active listening skills and attending skills discussed earlier in the book to create a comfortable, nonjudgmental and safe environment for the students. Remember the 13 roadblocks to communication and make sure you are not using them.

- Identify a resource person in your community with whom you can consult and to whom you can refer clients. Some possible suggestions are: the local mental

health center, hospital, office of mental health services, or 24 hour hotline (Contact Helpline, Samaritans).

- Contact the referral source for the student and DO NOT ATTEMPT to counsel the student yourself. Counseling professionals are trained to help people who are depressed and in danger of harming themselves.

- Use journal writing as a tool not only for practicing writing for the GED test, but also as a vehicle for expressing both positive and negative feelings. Many participants find journal writing cathartic and learners who may have disliked writing may see it in a new light.

- Speak to the learner individually and outside of the classroom. Many other staff personnel and fellow learners can get caught in the drama of having a suicidal person in the class and may attempt to intervene. From a classroom management perspective, learning must not be disrupted.

- Bring in speakers from local mental health centers to discuss depression and suicide. By getting acquainted with a counselor, participants may feel more comfortable in seeking help if they need it. Have learners learn the warning signs. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

- Maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the learner. Should they require hospitalization and become absent from class, do not go into specifics with the other learners.

- Do take each attempt seriously. Don't dismiss a suicidal threat and underestimate its importance.

- Don't try to use "reverse psychology" and challenge the individual to "go ahead and do it."

- Don't assume that a learner who mentions suicide once and then does not mention it again is safe from acting on their impulses. Time does not heal all wounds. Be aware of your own desire to "sweep things under the rug".

Parenting Issues

The instructor in the ABE classroom may overhear participants speak of their difficulties with parenting issues. They may come to the instructor asking for assistance in discipline or speak of their frustrations in dealing with their children. In certain circumstances an instructor may overhear descriptions of parenting that sound abusive.

As a mandated reporter, ABE instructors need to be aware of the indicators of abuse and neglect. While the ABE instructor may not see the children and be able to identify possible indicators of abuse, there are certain indicators of parents who abuse that instructors should be aware of. Among parental behavioral indicators are : misuse of alcohol or drugs, disorganized, chaotic homelife, isolation from friends and family, history of abuse or neglect as a child, poor impulse control, taking a child to different doctors or health care providers, describing a child as bad or evil, lack of concern about the child, and holding unrealistic expectations of the child. Many child abusers were themselves abused as children. These individuals generally respond poorly to stressful situations and are easily overwhelmed. Their knowledge about child development is limited; their knowledge of appropriate child behavior is unrealistic (Kempe & Helfer, 1972).

Abuse of children is not a new phenomenon. Our response as a society to the abuse of children was not as quick as we would like to think. A Society for the Protection of Animals was created in the United States prior to a Society for Protection of Children. Similar to the way we perceived spousal abuse, the treatment of the child

and the use of harsh and excessive disciplinary means were considered a private matter and not one for public debate or judgment.

Intervening in this type of situation can be very sensitive. The ABE instructor's interest may be perceived in a suspicious light. Awareness of your own feelings of anger and rage towards the parent should be acknowledged. The only way to get help for the child may lie in being able to reach the parent. Care must be given not to appear to be condescending or superior. Gentle discussion with participants done in a caring, nurturing tone is advised. Most importantly, treat the learner with respect and do not chastise her for ineffective parenting. Parenting is not a "natural" process, and many of these parents are unaware of what constitutes effective parenting. Acknowledge that being a parent is a tough job and that feelings of stress and feeling overwhelmed are common experiences. Janosik (1984) suggests asking the parent the following questions in a nonjudgmental, empathetic manner.

- Is there anyone available to help when your child is very demanding?
- When you are disappointed with your child's behavior, how do you feel?
- When your child cries or refuses to obey, what do you do?
- Do the eating, sleeping or toileting habits of your child upset you?
- What is your first reaction when you become angry with your child?

Unproductive interventions with abusive parents that Janosik (1984) advises against are:

- criticism, confrontation and castigation of parents

- imposition of personal values and standards by the professional (ABE instructor)
- expectation of immediate changes in the behavior of the parents
- identification either with the abused child or the abusive parent

Productive interventions with abusive parents include:

- discussion of child rearing and child discipline in general
- modification of unrealistic parental standards
- cooperation with the parents rather than retaliation
- toleration of anger expressed by parents
- modeling and teaching good parenting behavior
- consultation and referral to reduce overinvolvement

By using good attending and active listening skills, the instructor can broach the subject of parenting skills with the participant. It may be beneficial to utilize open ended questions concerning how the learner feels when they discipline their child harshly, whether the desired outcome occurs, and how they feel the child experiences the discipline. Sometimes an older, respected member of the class can be employed to provide peer support and mentoring. Inclusion of parenting videos, books and speakers also provides a gentle method of teaching effective parenting.

In dealing with instances where improved parenting skills are needed, ABE instructors should keep the following in mind:

- most of our learners may themselves have been parented inappropriately. Their choice of disciplinary methods may not be conscious choices, but may result from a lack of knowledge of options.

- be careful not to appear condescending or like an "expert." This will close down the open channel of communication.

- use a variety of methods to teach parenting skills. Learners have different learning styles and some will be more drawn to visual or auditory materials.

- rather than falling into the trap of giving advice or answering questions directly, utilize open questions that allow the learner to explore their options and come to their own decisions.

Offensive Language

Use of offensive language by participants is a common problem. Many of our participants come to the ABE classroom remembering the way things were when they were in the traditional classroom. Even though you may have a thirty year old participant in the room, they may equate learning with high school and the way they acted as a teenager. As a result, some participants may regress and act childish. It is important to set up the expectation that the classroom is similar to that of the workplace. It is not appropriate to use offensive language in the workplace, and it is not appropriate in the ABE classroom.

In order to handle this problem effectively, the ABE instructor needs to determine the purpose of the language. Determining the purpose of offensive language can be achieved either by observing when the language occurs or by asking the participant why they say certain things at certain times. Offensive language may be used to shock, to express anger or frustration, to gain power or to show off to new participants.

Participants may wish to shock the instructor or new participants by using offensive language and watching the individual's reaction. There is a power differential that occurs between the instructor and the participant. Using offensive language and shocking the instructor may be a way of trying to change the balance of power. Participants with low self esteem because of their lack of education may feel beneath the instructor and experience impotence and loss of control. The participant may use this language to "shake up" the instructor. Anger and frustration at not being able to master

certain subjects may result in use of offensive language. In this case participants can be taught to deal with their anger in other ways. They may wish to take a walk, to count to ten, or take a break from their work. These individuals may not know of any other way to handle their anger and need to learn new outlets for expressing their frustration. Inclusion of anger control and stress management in the lifeskills curriculum is one way of teaching them alternatives. Having the instructor model appropriate ways of dealing with frustration are also useful. Many participants experience a low level of frustration tolerance and are easily put off and angered. The presence of new participants in the program, new staff or changes in class schedule may result in an increase in inappropriate behavior. The use of offensive language can occur as a way of showing the "pecking order" of the class and introducing the new participant to the dynamics of the class. In our project, we have seen younger participants use offensive language as a way of showing off to new participants. This behavior may cease as time goes by and the new participant becomes part of the group.

The ABE instructor can intervene and decrease the usage of offensive language in a variety of ways. Behavior modification programs aimed at providing positive reinforcement for appropriate usage of language can be implemented. Those participants that have decreased their usage of offensive language can be given certificates or special class time to work on areas of interest. Ignoring the use of offensive language and positively reinforcing suitable language through social reinforcers is often the most effective intervention. Social reinforcers include smiles, nods and praise. Pointing out a learner's offensive language may result in having the learner receive reinforcement from

class members for being funny, disorderly, acting like the class clown or upsetting the instructor.

Another method of intervention is the use of a written contract. The contract stipulates that the participant will not use offensive language and indicates the consequences if the contract is broken. In order for this type of intervention to be effective, one may need to draw up a weekly or monthly contract; one contract covering the year or semester will soon be forgotten and become meaningless. A monthly contract will remind the participant that this is a definite problem and one that must be resolved successfully. (Example of a contract for offensive language is provided in Appendix B.)

The participant who uses offensive language as a way of controlling the classroom, the teacher or an uncomfortable situation will need to be dealt with in another manner. This type of individual should be taken out of the class to discuss their behavior because attention from others will reinforce their use of offensive language. The attention, smirks, or laughs from other classmates will increase the frequency of acting out behaviors. Attempts should be made to seat these types of participants away from other attention seeking participants. Another staff member such as a director or another instructor may be included to mediate.

In dealing with learners' use of offensive language remember to consider the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the language?

- Learners are in control of what they say and do not say. Teaching self-control and frustration tolerance are important competencies for life. Learners can master the ability to control these behaviors.

- Avoid providing any reinforcement for the learner by showing your own shock, anger or frustration with the situation.

- Reiterate that this type of behavior is not accepted in the workplace and therefore, has no place in the ABE classroom.

Learner Conflicts

Many ABE classrooms are in neighborhoods where participants have knowledge of each other and their families. As a result, participant conflict can occur, caused either by pre-existing relationships or by animosity that develops in the course of learning. As with the other learner crises that we have addressed, other members of the class may become embroiled in the difficulty, causing learning to cease. The ABE instructor can begin to feel anger at the parties involved and the loss of control in her own classroom.

Conflicts can be characterized as resulting from either realistic or unrealistic goals (Bolton, 1979). Realistic conflict is conflict that results from ignorance, displaced hostility, or judgmental thinking. Realistic conflict is born from two individuals possessing opposing needs, values or goals. Many of the conflicts that we experience in the ABE classroom grow out of unrealistic conflict. As a result, attempts at resolving the conflict (which is often highly personal and historical) are useless. The teacher can waste a great deal of time and end up ostracizing members of the class by getting involved in mediation.

Instead, conflicts are best handled in the following manner:

- Utilize active listening skills
- Be careful about the barriers to communication
- Use reflection and open questions to communicate what you hear as the issues
- Do not take sides or make judgments
- Do not get involved with what other learners relate as "the real story"

- Remain emotionally detached. .

Reiterate to participants that the purpose of the classroom is to learn and move towards the goal of obtaining the GED. Arguments, sarcastic remarks and fighting defeat this purpose and make learning difficult for the innocent parties in the classroom. Remind learners why they are in the classroom. Many of our participants are very sensitive to conflict and to perceived slights by others. A large number of our participants dropped out of school because of conflicts with teachers and school administration. Ultimately, their leaving school resulted in their own suffering. "Fight or flight" appears to be a common response in this population. The threat of their leaving class because of the actions or behaviors of another participant is high.

An effective way to deal with conflict among learners is to establish a written contract that is signed each week or month. The contract stipulates that the learner's purpose in attending class is to acquire knowledge, *not* to engage in personal conflicts with others. A sample contract is listed in Appendix B. This contract can be adapted for a variety of uses. If the contract is a weekly contract, be sure to follow up. Participants will pick up on your not taking the contract seriously; they will follow suit.

If two participants are engaged in conflict, you may need to alter the seating arrangements of the class. In order not to focus attention on the guilty parties, change everyone's seats rather than only the seats of the participants who are fighting.

Be aware of the timing when conflict arises. Are the participants engaging in this behavior to get attention from other class members? Are they having trouble mastering a certain subject and diverting their attention to something else? What benefits occur when they argue? As with other crises, speak with the offending parties away from other

class members. The main objective in resolving conflict is for learning to continue without being sidetracked.

REFERENCES

Abramson, L.Y., Seligman, M.E.P. & Teasdale, J.D. (1978). Learned helplessness in humans: Critique and reformation. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 87,. 49-74.

Benjamin, A. (1978). The helping interview: With case illustrations. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Bolton, R. (1979). People Skills: How to assert yourself, listen to others and resolve conflicts. New York: Touchstone Books.

Brammer, L.M. (1981). The helping relationship-Process and skills. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall.

Caplan, G. (1964). Principles of preventive psychiatry. New York:Basic Books.

Frederick, C.J., & Lague, L. (1978). Dealing with the crisis of suicide. Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Pamphlet #406A.

Goldman, J.L. (1991). Arresting wife batterers: A good beginning to stopping a pervasive problem. Washington University Law Quarterly, 69, 843-856.

Gordon, T. (1970). Parent effectiveness training: the no- lose program for raising responsible children. New York: Wyden.

Halpern, H. A. (1973). Crisis theory: A defnitional study. Community Mental Health Journal, 9, 342-349.

Janosik, E.H. (1984). Crisis counseling:A contemporary approach. Monterey, California: Wadsworth.

Kempe, C.H.& Helfer, R.E. (Eds.) (1972). Helping the battered child and his family. Philadelphia: Lippincott.

Leone, B. (Ed.) (1994). Violence against women: Current controversies. San Diego: Greenhaven Publishers.

Liddell, H.G. & Scott, R. (1968). The greek-english lexicon. Oxford:Clarendon Press.

Rogers, C.R. (1961). On becoming a person. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Shulman, E.D. (1982). Intervention in the human services. St. Louis: C.V. Mosby.

Truax, C.B. & Carkhuff, R.R. (1967). Toward effective counseling and psychotherapy. Chicago: Aldine.

Walker, L. (1979). The battered woman. New York: Harper & Row.

Walker, L. (1984) The battered woman. New York: Springer.

Walker, L. (1985). Psychological impact of the criminalization of domestic violence on victims. Victimology: An International Journal,10, 281-300.

Wilhelm, R. (1967). The book of changes or i ching. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

APPENDIX A

The Story Of Millie

Millie is a 20 year old female who has just joined your ABE program. She left high school because of an unplanned pregnancy. She has two children, ages three and five. Millie wants to get a GED to help her obtain a job. She is presently receiving public assistance. Millie expresses some concern about being in the classroom. She feels there are too many people around her and feels anxious.

In her third week of class, Millie tells you that she is 3 months pregnant and feels ambivalent about the impending birth. Other class members overhear this and begin to offer their own thoughts about Millie's pregnancy.

Ruth, a middle aged participant calls her a "slut" and warns her that it is immoral to be single and having babies: "Why buy the cow when you can have the milk for free? You are going to end up just like your mother--living off the system." Seeing that Millie is looking upset at Ruth's words, Alice tells Millie that her sister had four children before age 20 and she turned out just fine. Marisol, the teacher's aide asks Millie who the father is, if she still plans on taking the GED, and what her future plans are. Lois, the instructor, notices that Millie is becoming more alarmed as the class focuses their attention on her; she pats her hand and says, "Everything will be all right. You are working so hard, and you want better in life. You'll pass your GED with flying colors."

How many roadblocks occurred in this story?

Answer:

name calling

moralizing

diagnosing

diverting

excessive questioning

praising evaluatively

reassuring

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE CONTRACT

I, _____ am participating in a GED program
(Learners's name)

in order to improve my education and obtain my GED. In order to help me towards this goal, I agree to attend class regularly, do my work and respect the rights of my classmates. I realize that when I_____this violates others' rights and
(behavior)

interferes with my goals. I agree not to _____
(behavior)

while in class and understand the consequences that can occur should I engage in this behavior.

This contract will be revoked on_____.

_____ _____
signature of learner witness-instructor

_____
date

Mississippi State
UNIVERSITY